

THE NATURE OF VANDALISM AMONG RURAL YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the extent and pattern of vandalism committed by sophomore and junior students from five rural high schools in Ohio and Indiana. The results revealed that slightly more than one-half of the students have committed at least one act of vandalism in their lifetime. The paper also examines the circumstances surrounding the commission of vandalistic acts, and then delineates significant demographic and social differences between vandals and non-vandals. The paper concludes with a generalized model of conditioning affecting involvement in vandalism among rural youth and suggests various prevention strategies.

THE NATURE OF VANDALISM AMONG RURAL YOUTH

INTRODUCTION

A recent newspaper article described vandalism in the United States as a "\$2 Billion-a-Year Tantrum" (Shannon, 1979:1). Schools alone were reported vandalized to the amount of \$600 million annually. Homes and automotive vehicles were also frequent victims of a growing and costly form of criminal behavior. However, a recent study summarized by U.S. News and World Report (1979:59) estimated that vandalism only to commercial establishments exceeded \$2.5 billion per year. This finding suggests that the problem may be far greater than the newspaper headline above indicated.

The FBI (U.S. Department of Justice, 1978) defines vandalism as:

"...the willful or malicious destruction, injury, disfigurement or defacement of any public or private property, real or personal, without consent of the owner or person having custody or control, by cutting, tearing, breaking, marking, painting, drawing, covering with filth, or any other means as may be specified by local law."

In 1978, an estimated 223,391 persons were arrested for committing acts of vandalism (U.S. Department of Justice, 1978:187).

The reader may initially assume that vandalism is more extensive in the larger cities of the United States. However, several recent rural crime studies also document the extensiveness of vandalism in rural areas. A 1975 investigation of the types of crimes occurring to open-country households in Ohio found that nearly one in every four were the victims of at least one act of vandalism annually (Phillips, 1976). Similar research from a rural farm community in Northwest Indiana undertaken in

1977-78, and a coal county in Southwest Indiana conducted in 1978-79, indicated that nearly 10 percent of the open-country and small town households had an act of vandalism committed against them (Smith, 1979; Donnermeyer, 1980a).

Rural businesses also appear to be frequent target for vandalism. The Northwest Indiana rural crime study extended its analysis to include local commercial establishments. Vandalism was one of the most frequently mentioned crimes occurring to the commercial establishments participating in the study, accounting for nearly 30 percent of all criminal incident reports. The average cost of an act of vandalism was found to be about \$80 (Smith, 1979). Results from a study of crimes committed against farm retail outlets, including both roadside markets and pick-your-own operations, indicates that vandalism is the most serious problem in both volume of incidents occurring and average cost per incident. Nearly one-half of the farm retail outlets experienced at least one act of vandalism annually. Average cost per incident was \$83 (Donnermeyer, et al., 1980b).

Vandalism to rural public property likewise has become a multi-million dollar problem. Research on the expense of repair or replacement of vandalized road signs located on county roads in rural Ohio found an annual cost figure of \$20.27 per mile (Donnermeyer, et al., 1980c).

Who commits vandalism in rural areas? Arrest records of sheriff departments from the rural Ohio crime study found the offender to be most often a teenager (Phillips, 1976). Whether it occurs in urban or rural areas, vandalism has long been considered a "youth crime." One picture of vandalism is that of the "boys-will-be-boys" variety. Vandalism by rural youth in particular is perceived as the "traditional" acts often

associated with Halloween, such as turning over outdoor latrines, which are then put back in place the next day. A second image is that destructive and malicious acts of vandals are committed by only a small proportion of young persons, and that generally it is the result of a poor family environment or some other form of social malaise which causes the vandal to exhibit "abnormal" behavior patterns. Therefore, if rural youth engage in vandalistic behavior of a destructive nature, it must be somehow "abnormal" or "atypical," and is caused by idiosyncratic or circumstantial characteristics associated with the social environment of the particular vandal.

However, images are one thing, reality is another. The purpose of this chapter will be to examine the pattern of rural vandalism based upon two studies of self-reported vandalistic behavior among rural high school students. It will attempt to answer four basic questions. First, how widespread is involvement in vandalistic behavior among rural youth? Second, what are the situational characteristics associated with the commission of vandalism by rural youth? Third, what motivates rural youth to commit acts of vandalism? Finally, are there differences between the vandal and non-vandal by their age, sex, family background, and participation in church and activities beyond regular school hours, such as varsity sports, 4-H clubs, church youth groups, and others.

STUDY AREAS

(A) The Ohio Study¹

The Ohio vandalism study was part of a broader research project on the phenomenon of rural crime. The larger project had randomly selected one cluster of three contiguous counties from each of three sub-state

regions of Ohio. These sub-state regions included the Industrial Northeast, Appalachia (Southeast), and the Corn Belt (Central and Western Ohio). The sample consisted of all sophomore level students from one high school within each of the three clusters. The high schools from which the sample was selected were predominantly rural in nature. The three high schools were within local county school districts. High schools from city and village school districts were not considered as part of the universe from which the samples were selected because of the possibility that a larger proportion of the student body would be from urban areas.

The sophomore level was selected because this grade level contains mostly 15 and 16 year olds. Students in this age group became licensed drivers and this phenomenon was hypothesized to be related to a marked increase in vandalistic behavior.

The total number of sophomores from the three high schools was 634. The survey instrument was administered at the high schools in March, 1975. The instrument was distributed to 599 sophomores, of whom 572 returned useable responses. The absenteeism rate among sophomores during the day on which the survey was administered at each high school averaged 5.5 percent.

At each of the three high schools, the questionnaire was group administered. Students were instructed not to put their name or any other form of identification on the questionnaire. Upon its completion, each student himself inserted the survey instrument through a slot into a sealed box.

The content of the survey instrument relied upon self-reports by the respondent with respect to committing acts of vandalism. The instrument

included questionnaire items on the number of acts of vandalism engaged in by the respondent, and the events surrounding the most recent commission of vandalism, such as when the act was committed, the number of persons present, the type of property which was damaged or destroyed, how the respondent became involved, and self-perceptions of his/her own vandalistic behavior. The instrument also included questions pertaining to the social, economic, and family background of the respondent.

(B) The Indiana Study²

The Indiana vandalism study was conducted in an effort to replicate the results of the Ohio study. With some minor changes in wording and format, the same survey instrument was employed. In addition, the survey instrument was supplemented with a series of items on participation in extra-curricular activities, both those associated with the local high school, as well as out-of-school activities. These items were included in an effort to examine the relationship between the likelihood of committing vandalism and participation in extra-curricular activities.

The survey instrument was administered to 354 junior level (11th grade) high school students from two school districts in a rural county of Southwestern Indiana. The largest city in the county has a population of about 2,700 persons, according to the 1979 Census estimate of the population. The economy of the county is dominated by the coal industry, although agriculture is likewise important.

The survey instrument was administered to the junior class in May, 1979. At both high schools, the survey was group-administered. School personnel were available to monitor the process, however, in order to assure complete anonymity of response, at no time were school officials

allowed to handle the survey forms. The average absenteeism rate on the days the instrument was administered to both junior classes was about 4 percent.

Both the Ohio and Indiana samples represent a large segment of youth growing up on the contemporary social and cultural environment of rural areas in the Midwest. Although both studies were not designed to measure the vandalistic behavior of high school drop-outs or chronic truants, these individuals compose only a small proportion of rural youth. In addition, the purpose of both studies was to examine the vandalistic behavior among typical young persons from rural areas.

COMMITTING VANDALISM

What proportion of the students have engaged in vandalism? The FBI definition of vandalism as "malicious destruction" cited earlier in this chapter was utilized in both studies in order to define what constituted vandalistic behavior for the respondents.³ Based upon the FBI definition of vandalism, nearly 52 percent of the Ohio and Indiana respondents admitted to committing one or more acts of vandalism during their lifetime (Table 1). These results are strikingly similar in given the independent administration of both studies.

Table 1 also indicates that vandalism is a recurring form of behavior. Among those who had participated in vandalism, nearly three quarters of the Ohio respondents, and three-fifths of the Indiana respondents, had committed acts of vandalism at least three times.

TABLE 1: Frequency of Participation in Acts of Vandalism
Among Rural Youth

Number Vandalistic Acts Committed	Study Area			
	Ohio		Indiana	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
None	277	48.4	169	47.7
One or Two	76	13.3	75	21.2
Three or More	<u>219</u>	<u>38.3</u>	<u>110</u>	<u>31.1</u>
Total	572	100.0	354	100.0

TYPES AND SEVERITY OF VANDALISM

These results suggest that vandalism among rural youth may be a very normal form of behavior. However, what are the types of vandalism in which rural youth engage? If a slight majority of rural youth do actually commit vandalism, what are its levels of destructiveness? The Indiana study expanded analysis of rural vandalism by soliciting a brief narrative description of the most recent act of vandalism in which the respondents had engaged. Each description was classified into one of four categories, according to the severity of the vandalistic act. Severity was defined as the degree of damage or destruction to the vandalized property. Damage or destruction was designated as referring to either the dollar value of the affected object, and/or to the amount of work or effort necessary for the victim to repair, clean up, or in some way correct the damage.⁴

The four categories into which the vandalistic acts described by the Indiana respondents were classified included: (1) minor, (2) somewhat serious, (3) serious, and (4) very serious. Types of vandalism which fell into the minor category included such "traditional" activities as soaping

car or house windows, and draping toilet paper over trees, shrubs, houses, and other objects. Minor acts of vandalism composed 26.2 percent of all acts described by respondents to the Indiana study.

The "somewhat serious" category exhibited more malicious examples of vandalism. Typical of the vandalistic acts at this level included throwing eggs at cars and houses, damaging or attempting to crush trashcans, spray painting road signs, and digging up bushes in yards. What may perhaps be a unique form of rural vandalism was the practice by one respondent of filling the purses of female students at his high school with fresh cow manure.

These examples of vandalism from the "somewhat serious" category generally manifested either a modest dollar cost or some inconvenience to clean-up or repair the damage to the victim. This level of vandalism represented 29.6 percent of the total acts described by the Indiana sample.

The type of vandalism classified as "serious" included such acts as breaking street lights or house windows, shooting out road signs, and spray painting automotive vehicles. Two particular types of vandalism included in this category required access to a car or truck. These were "driving a 4-wheel drive jeep" through a recreation area in order to rip up the sod on the baseball and other playing fields, and driving through a graveyard for the purpose of damaging gravestones. Acts of vandalism within the "serious" category made up 35.3 percent of all acts described in the Indiana study.

Within the "very serious" category were included the most malicious forms of property destruction and defacement. Examples of the type of vandalistic acts at this level of severity were breaking out car windows,

ripping out drive-in theater speakers from their stands, burning down a barn, and "destroying" the interior of a hotel room. These examples of vandalistic behavior, accounting for 8.9 percent of the total, generally exhibited a high dollar cost to the victim.

In summary, the patterns which emerge about vandalism by rural youth from the Ohio and Indiana studies reveal several major points. First, vandalism is not an activity restricted to only a few so-called "bad apples." A slight majority of the respondents from both studies have committed at least one act of vandalism in their lifetime. Second, vandalism by rural youth is not a "one time" action. Most of the rural high school students from the Ohio and Indiana studies admitted to having committed three or more acts of vandalism. Third, nearly three-quarters of the vandalism involving rural youth display a level of severity which, from the point of view of the victim, generally would be considered as more than a simple Halloween prank. Descriptions of vandalism provided by respondents in the Indiana study indicated extensive property damage, and in only one-quarter of the cases could the act of vandalism be viewed as a "Halloween styled" prank.

CIRCUMSTANCES ASSOCIATED WITH THE COMMISSION OF VANDALISM

Respondents to both the Ohio and Indiana studies were asked a series of follow-up questions on the situation and circumstances related to the most recent act of vandalism in which they had participated. This chapter will explore several specific patterns of vandalism by rural youth, such as the location and type of property vandalized, when acts of vandalism were committed, whether or not vandalism is an individual behavior or if

occurs in a group setting, the mode of transportation to the site where the vandalism took place, and the use of alcohol and drugs in association with the commission of vandalism.

LOCATION AND TYPE OF PROPERTY VANDALIZED

Where does vandalism committed by rural youth take place? Does it only occur in rural areas? Or is it restricted to the Main Street of nearby small towns? Or instead, does it tend to occur at larger cities outside the rural young person's county of residence?

Forty-three percent of the most recent acts of vandalism committed by the respondents from the Ohio study, and 49 percent from the Indiana study, were located exclusively in rural areas. The type of property most frequently vandalized in rural areas was the non-farm residence. Public property located in rural areas was vandalized nearly as often.

An urban location was the site for vandalism in 35 percent of the time in the Ohio study, and approximately 40 percent of the time in the Indiana study. A residence was the most frequent target for vandalism in an urban area. Similar to the pattern of vandalism if occurring in a rural location, public property was the second most frequent target in urban locations.

Most of the vandalism committed by rural youth occurs in the county of residence. Nearly 83 percent of the most recent acts of vandalism described in the Ohio study, and about 70 percent from the Indiana study, occurred in the county of residence of the perpetrator. If the site for vandalism was located outside of the county of residence, it tended to be within the boundary of a nearby city or town which was easily

accessible by car. However, the most important insight which emerged was that vandalism within small town and rural communities was "local," and not due to "outsiders."

WHEN VANDALISM OCCURS

It has long been assumed that there is a temporal pattern to vandalism. One such assumption is that vandalism is an activity which manifests itself most often during the autumn months, while another is that vandalism was made for weekends. In both studies, the three autumn months of September, October, and November were most likely to be the time in which vandalism occurred. Thirty-one percent of the most recent acts of vandalism from the Ohio study and 49 percent from the Indiana study, were committed during the fall months. However in Ohio, it was nearly as likely for the vandalism to have occurred during the winter months of December, January, and February (28 percent). Only 10 percent of the vandalism committed by rural youth from the Indiana study took place in the winter. In the Ohio study, 18 percent of the vandalism was committed during the spring (March, April, and May), and 23 percent during the summer (June, July, and August). In the Indiana study, 29 percent of the vandalism was committed during the spring months, and 12 percent during the summer months.

Despite the differences in the distribution of vandalism by season of the year between the Ohio and Indiana studies, both demonstrate two things. First, the greatest proportion of vandalism committed by rural youth occurred during the autumn season (i.e., the Halloween season). Second, despite this fact, in both studies over one-half of the incidents of vandalism took place during the other nine months of the year. This

indicates that vandalism was spread throughout the full year, and may occur during any month. These findings strongly support the contention that vandalism is no longer prankism associated with Halloween but a year round problem.

According to the day of the week, nearly three out of every five acts of vandalism committed by students to the Ohio study, and over two-thirds of those perpetrated by the students to the Indiana study took place during the weekend (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday). The remaining proportion of vandalism in both studies were evenly spread through the other four days of the week. The OHio study also found that a majority of the vandalism occurred in the early evening hours, from 5 P.M. to 8 P.M. These results indicate that vandalism among rural youth is a leisure time activity. Weekdays, for 9 or 10 months of the year are filled up with school related activities. Weekends generally are more "open" and less structured with respect to the use of non-school hours, because there is a reduced need for youth in work-related roles in contemporary rural society. As a result, this free time is often filled up with activities which are in violation of the behavioral proscriptions of society, such as vandalism.

VANDALISM AS A GROUP ACTIVITY

One of the most powerful social forces influencing the behavior of high school-age youth is the peer group. Peer group pressure may be translated in many ways, but very often it means a set of norms and values which deviate from the larger culture. As a result, youth must often choose between conflicting loyalties, that is, between what his

friends of the same age want him to do, and what his family and other authority figures define as proper.

Generally, vandalism has been recognized as a "group activity." The Ohio and Indiana studies confirm a similar pattern among rural youth. IN both studies, between 90 to 95 percent of the most recent acts of vandalism described by the respondents were committed in association with one or more other individuals. About one-quarter of the vandalistic acts involved a group with only two persons, and about one-quarter included three persons. Approximately two out of every five acts of vandalism were committed in groups of four or more persons in both the Ohio and Indiana studies.

MODE OF TRANSPORTATION AND VANDALISM

In both studies, the predominant mode of transportation was a motor vehicle. Forty-seven percent of the most recent acts of vandalism in Ohio, and 60 percent in Indiana involved the use of a motor vehicle. Most of the time the motor vehicle was a car. Only in about 20 percent of the cases was the motor vehicle a truck or motorcycle. Walking was the second most popular means of travel in both studies, 35 percent of the total in Ohio and 28 percent in Indiana accounting for the remaining cases of vandalism involved other modes of transportation, such as a bicycle or combination of walking and a motor vehicle.

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

In the description of their most recent act of vandalism, the respondents from the Ohio and Indiana studies were asked if they or

other persons in the group were drinking alcoholic beverages or using drugs near to the time at which the vandalism took place. Nearly 40 percent of rural youth in the Ohio study, and 46 percent from Indiana said that alcohol was being consumed. Beer and whiskey were the most often mentioned types of alcohol from the Ohio youth. While beer was also popular among the Indiana youth, whiskey was barely mentioned.

About 12 percent of the respondents from the Ohio study said that either themselves or someone in the group had been using drugs near the time that the vandalism was committed. Among those from the Indiana study, about 18 percent mentioned the use of drugs. In both cases, marijuana was the most popular drug in use.

In summary, highlights of the circumstances surrounding the commission of vandalism by rural youth include several major points. First, both private residents and public property were attractive targets for vandalism by rural youth. Business establishments located in either rural or urban areas tended to be left alone. This may be due to the fact that commercial establishments take precautions with respect to burglary and theft prevention, which act in turn as deterrents to vandalism. Second, rural youth commit vandalism in their county of residence. Third, although the occurrence of vandalism tended to be concentrated in the autumn, it may take place during any month of the year. Fourth, vandalism by rural youth tended to occur on weekends when there was the greatest amount of free-time available. Fifth, vandalism was a group activity, that is, most rural youth who committed vandalistic acts did so in a group, and rarely while alone. Sixth, most rural youth travelled to the site where vandalism took place by means of a car, although about

one-third of the time walking was the primary mode of transportation. Finally, although there was the frequent use of alcohol or drugs by someone in the group when vandalism took place, there was an equal likelihood that neither one were being consumed.

PERCEPTION OF VANDALISM BY RURAL YOUTH

How do rural youth who commit vandalism perceive their own actions? Is vandalism viewed as a game or joke? Or is it viewed as something more serious? The Ohio study found that a majority of those who had committed an act of vandalism became involved because they "just happened to be there," "bored," "playing around," or "pressured by other." Significantly, less than one of ten described their involvement in vandalism as a "Halloween prank," or "practical joke." In essence, involvement was unplanned, and in many cases, even spontaneous.

Table 2 summarizes the self-perceptions of respondents to both the Ohio and Indiana studies about their vandalistic behavior. It is readily apparent that a large majority of the respondents viewed their most recent act of vandalism as a game, joke, or contest. In other words, the commission of vandalism was perceived as "just for fun." Less than one out of every five acts of vandalism were viewed as "getting even" or revenge, and fewer than 10 percent were perceived as other reasons such as seeking to draw attention to a problem or issue, an expression of rage, or associated with the commission of some other crime. The Ohio study expanded analysis of self-perception of vandalism to include whether or not the respondents viewed their own vandalistic behavior as a criminal act? Nearly 71 percent did not view their behavior as in any way constituting a crime, or as wrong.

TABLE 2: Self-perceptions of Vandalistic Behavior
by Rural Youth

Behavior	Study Area			
	Ohio		Indiana	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
A Game, Fun, Contest, etc.	164	64.3	102	67.5
Getting Even, Revenge	32	12.5	29	19.2
Side Effect of Committing A More Serious Offense	20	7.8	10	6.6
An Expression of Rage	11	4.3	0	0.0
To Draw Attention to an Issue or Grievance	10	3.9	5	3.3
Other Reasons	18	7.1	5	3.3
Total	255	100.0	151	100.0

Clinard and Quinney (1967) likewise found that most vandals do not perceive their behavior as criminal. The consensus among social scientists who have studied vandalistic behavior is that in general it is motivated by competitive and status-seeking opportunities within the peer group setting. As evidenced by the results from the Ohio and Indiana studies, these same social forces appear to be operative among rural youth.

WHO COMMITS VANDALISM AMONG RURAL YOUTH

The results from the Ohio and Indiana studies have indicated that a slight majority of rural youth have engaged in acts of vandalism at least once in their lifetime. Furthermore, among a great majority of these individuals, vandalism is a recurring form of behavior. Who among rural

youth participate in vandalistic behavior? Is there a profile of what the typical rural vandal looks like with respect to such characteristics as sex, age, family background, and participation in organized youth activities?

AGE AND SEX

It is generally assumed that among younger persons, males would be far more prone to engage in vandalistic behavior than females. The results from both studies do confirm that a greater proportion of the males have been involved in vandalism than their female counterparts. Slightly over 68 percent of the male respondents to the Ohio study, and 62 percent of the males from the Indiana study have participated in vandalism. In contrast, only about 37 percent of the female students in the Ohio study and nearly 43 percent of the females from the Indiana study have engaged in vandalistic behavior.⁵ Although there is a considerable difference between the male and female respondents, it is noteworthy that among the female group, nearly two out of every five had committed an act of vandalism. While males tended to be the major perpetrators, vandalism was certainly not a behavior engaged in exclusively by the male sex.

Is there a difference in the proportion of rural youth who commit acts of vandalism according to their age? The Ohio study indicated that among sophomore students, there was no difference in the proportion of youth 15 years of age and under who have committed vandalism when compared with sophomores 16 years and over. In fact, there was a slightly higher proportion of the 15 and under age group (53.2 percent) who have engaged in vandalistic behavior than among those 16 and over (50.4 percent). In stark contrast, the results from the Indiana study of junior students

indicate a significant difference by age, and in the opposite direction from the Ohio findings. Only about 43 percent of the juniors 16 years of age and younger have been involved in vandalism, compared to slightly over 56 percent of those 17 years and over.⁶ The lack of a pattern from the data on the relationship of age and involvement in acts of vandalism indicates that age distribution may be conditional to the specific characteristics of the local area. Additional research, however, is necessary in order to further clarify the relationship between age and vandalism.

MARITAL STATUS OF HOUSEHOLD HEAD

One common image of the teenage vandal is that he or she is likely to come from a "broken home," which generally means a one parent household. Information on the relationship between marital status and participation in vandalism is shown in Table 3. The findings from the Ohio study indicate a significant difference according to involvement in vandalism between those youth who were from a situation in which the household head was married and those in which the household head was divorced, separated, or widowed. There was a similar pattern found in the results from the Indiana study, however, the difference was not statistically significant.⁷

In an earlier discussion about the temporal occurrence of vandalism committed by rural youth, it was suggested that vandalism is a consequent of how free-time is used. The results from Table 3 further suggest that degree of parental supervision, as measured by the marital status of the household head, does have something to do with whether or not rural youth engage in vandalistic behavior. The Ohio study extended analysis of the relationship between vandalism and the youth's orientation to his family

TABLE 3: Involvement of Rural Youth in Acts of Vandalism and Marital Status of Household Head

Study Area	Involvement in Acts of Vandalism					
	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
OHIO						
Married	236	49.4	242	50.6	478	100.0
Divorced, Separated, or Widowed	37	69.18	16	30.2	53	100.0
Total	273	51.4	278	46.6	531	100.0
INDIANA						
Married	156	51.5	147	48.5	303	100.0
Divorced, Separated, or Widowed	22	61.1	14	38.9	36	100.0
Total	178	52.5	161	47.5	339	100.0

through examination of self-assessment of the young person's orientation toward participation in family activities. The respondent was asked to indicate the degree to which he "liked" or "disliked" doing "things" with his family. The relationship between involvement in vandalism and both of these factors is summarized in Table 4. There was a significant difference between feelings about participating in family activities and involvement in vandalism. Only 39 percent of those who indicated that they like "very much" to do things with their family have committed acts of vandalism. Comparatively, slightly over 57 percent of those who "disliked" participating in family activities have engaged in vandalistic behavior.⁸

TABLE 4: Involvement of Rural Ohio High School Sophomores in Acts of Vandalism and Self-Perception About Participation in Family Activities

Feelings About Being With and Doing Things With the Family	Involvement in Vandalism					
	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Like to Very Much	57	39.0	89	61.0	146	100.0
Like to Somewhat	188	56.0	148	44.0	336	100.0
Dislike	42	57.5	31	42.5	73	100.0
Total	287	51.7	268	48.3	555	100.0

Most explanations of delinquent behavior consider the strength of the bond between the adolescent and the parents to be a critical factor (Natalino, 1979: 3-6). For instance, Hirschi (1969) has found that an effective deterrent to delinquent behavior in general is the internalization of parental norms and conformity to parental expectations. The findings in Table 4 show a similar pattern with respect to the commission of vandalism. Rural youth who perceived themselves as negatively oriented toward participation in family activities manifested a greater tendency to become involved in vandalism. In contrast, rural youth who perceived themselves as positively oriented toward participation in family activities were less prone to engage in vandalistic behavior.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

In addition to the family, a second important institution in rural society is the church. Does affiliation with and participation in church-related activities differentiate the vandal from the non-vandal among

rural youth? Table 5 summarizes the results from the Ohio and Indiana studies on this question. In both cases, membership alone has little effect on involvement in vandalistic behavior. Nearly 52 percent of the rural youth from the Ohio study who had committed an act of vandalism were formally affiliated with a church. This compares to about 53 percent of those from the vandal group who had no religious affiliation whatsoever. There is a somewhat greater difference between vandals and non-vandals according to the proportion who are affiliated with a church, in the Indiana study, however, the differential is not statistically significant.⁹

In addition to religious affiliation, both studies also collected information on the frequency of participation in religious and church-related activities. The findings in Table 10 do indicate that rural youth from both studies have a greater tendency to have engaged in acts of vandalism with less frequent participation in church-related activities. For instance, 42 percent of the sophomores from the Ohio study who participated in religious activities weekly have committed an act of vandalism, compared to nearly 55 percent who "rarely" or "never" get involved in church-related affairs. Likewise, 46 percent of the juniors from the Indiana study who participated in church-related activities have been involved in the commission of an act of vandalism, compared to nearly 59 percent who participate "rarely" or "never."¹⁰

These findings suggest that religious affiliation does not differentiate the vandal from the non-vandal among rural youth. However, when viewed from degree of participation in church-related activities, there was a significant difference. A social control theory of delinquent

TABLE 5: Involvement of Rural Youth in Acts of Vandalism and Membership and Participation in Church Activities

Study Area	Involvement in Acts of Vandalism					
	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
OHIO						
Church Membership						
Yes	212	51.5	203	48.9	415	100.0
No	73	52.9	65	47.1	138	100.0
Total	285	51.5	268	48.5	553	100.0
Frequency of Participation						
Weekly	42	42.0	58	58.0	100	100.0
Several Times Per Month	102	52.3	93	47.9	195	100.0
Rarely/Never	147	54.6	122	45.4	269	100.0
Total	291	51.6	273	48.4	564	100.0
INDIANA						
Church Membership						
Yes	139	50.4	137	49.6	276	100.0
No	34	57.6	25	42.4	59	100.0
Total	173	51.6	162	48.4	335	100.0
Frequency of Participation						
Weekly	86	46.0	101	54.0	187	100.0
Several Times Per Month	23	57.5	17	42.5	40	100.0
Rarely/Never	63	58.9	44	41.1	107	100.0
Total	172	51.5	162	48.5	334	100.0

behavior "holds that non-delinquent youths are insulated from delinquency by strong ties to the conventional order" (Nataline, 1979:2). The role of the family is one important aspect of this, and the results from the

Ohio study (Table 4) certainly do indicate the affect of family life on involvement in vandalism. This pattern is equally reinforced by the relationship participation in church activities and vandalism.

PARTICIPATION IN EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Since participation in church-related activities does distinguish the vandal from the non-vandal, what is the relationship between participation in extra-curricular activities, both in and out of school and vandalism? In an attempt to examine this question, the Indiana study included a series of questions on participation in clubs, organized sporting events, and other associations either affiliated with the school, or sponsored by other organizations (i.e., 4-H, Rural Youth, softball leagues, senior scouts, etc.) that occur outside of regular school hours. As the results, which are summarized in Table 6, indicate,

TABLE 6: Involvement of Rural Indiana High School Juniors in Acts of Vandalism and Participation in Extra-Curricular Activities

Participation in Extra-Curricular Activities	Involvement in Acts of Vandalism					
	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
School-Related Activities						
One or More	102	49.5	104	50.5	206	100.0
None	73	53.7	63	46.3	136	100.0
Total	175	51.2	167	48.8	342	100.0
Out of School Activities						
One or More	81	47.6	89	52.4	170	100.0
None	96	55.5	77	44.5	173	100.0
Total	177	51.6	166	48.4	343	100.0

there was at best a weak association between participation in extra-curricular activities and involvement in vandalism. There was a slight tendency for those with no extra-curricular activities to have engaged in vandalistic behavior, however, the percentage difference was not statistically significant.¹¹

These results do not support the common sense notion that participation in organized activities outside of regular school hours reduces the likelihood that the young person will not engage in vandalistic behavior.

VANDALISM AMONG RURAL YOUTH: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ohio and Indiana studies highlight several important patterns about vandalism among rural youth. First, contrary to popular belief, most acts of vandalism are not "harmless pranks." Based upon descriptions provided by the junior high school students from the Indiana study, nearly three out of every four acts of vandalism involved either a direct economic cost to the victim or an indirect cost in terms of the victim's time to repair or clean up damage. Second, slightly over one-half of the rural youth in the two samples have participated in at least one act of vandalism, and a majority of these youth have been repeatedly involved three or more times. Third, the evidence from both the Ohio and Indiana studies indicate that vandalism is "normatively acceptable" behavior. Not only have a majority of the respondents engaged in vandalistic behavior three or more times, but nearly two-thirds in both study areas perceived vandalism as a "game" or "joke." Additional analysis of the self-perceptions of their own vandalistic behavior among the Ohio sample indicated

that very few viewed their action as in any way criminal. Further evidence that vandalism is normatively acceptable comes from the fact that over nine out of every ten respondents from both samples who have been involved, committed an act of vandalism while with one or more other persons, that is, in a "group" setting.

A fourth important pattern that emerges from the data is that vandalistic behavior is likely to occur in the county of residence of the vandal. The most likely target is a private residence, although public property is only slightly less likely to be involved. In addition, a rural location had a slightly greater chance of being selected for the vandalistic act.

Fifth, vandalism may occur during anytime of the year, further dispelling the notion that vandalism in rural areas is associated with the "Halloween spirit." However, the fall months still remain the most likely time for vandalism to be committed by rural youth. Sixth, vandalism was found to be largely a weekend activity. Seventh, in less than half of the cases it was mentioned by those who were involved in vandalism that someone in the group had recently consumed alcohol or were on drugs.

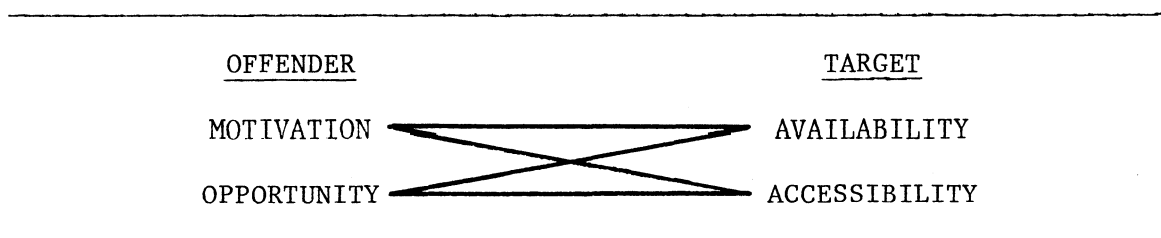
Eighth, there were several important distinguishing characteristics of the type of rural youth who has been involved in vandalism. The vandal was more likely to be male, although a sizeable minority of the female respondents from both studies have engaged in vandalistic behavior. Also, the head of the household at which the vandal resides was more likely to be divorced, separated, or widowed than the non-vandal. In addition, among the respondents from the Ohio study, positive feelings about participation in family-related activities were more likely to be exhibited by

the non-vandal than by the vandal. This indicates that the quality of the relationship between the young person and his parents (or guardians) may be important to the final determination of who among rural youth commit vandalism, because it is primarily through the parental units the normative prescriptions of what is right and what is wrong are learned.

Finally, perhaps the most surprising findings from the Ohio and Indiana studies was the fact that although participation in religious activities was related to non-participation in vandalistic behavior, neither participation in school-related or out-of-school related organized activities failed to significantly distinguish the vandal from the non-vandal.

It appears the commission of vandalism by rural youth is conditional upon four basic factors. These factors are summarized in Figure 1. On the left side are two factors associated with the offender: motivation and opportunity. On the right side are two factors associated with the target of the vandal: availability and accessibility.

FIGURE 1: Conditions Affecting Involvement in Vandalism
Among Rural Youth



MOTIVATION

The facts are that vandalism is a group activity, the majority of whom do not perceive the act as anything as anything more serious than a "game" or "joke." Vandalism is normatively acceptable and this is reinforced by the fact that a majority of rural youth (i.e., by the vandal's "peers") have committed at least one act of vandalism, and most have repeatedly engaged in such behavior.

This suggests that one primary method to reduce the commission of vandalism is through the "socialization" process, that is, during the acquisition of the values and norms that guide everyday behavior. This is no easy task, given the powerful influence of the peer group, especially during the teen years. A further obstacle arises from the fact that in rural as well as urban areas, there is an increased tendency for both parents in the family to work, which means less time for the young person to be involved in family activities and to be supervised by parents.

Educational institutions, particularly the primary and junior high school levels, have been targeted as appropriate situations in which such attitude and behavior change strategies could prove effective. One such approach is the "Crime Prevention Course for Young People" (Wurschmidt and Phillips, 1978; Miller Productions Incorporated, 1976; Hamrick, 1979). Generally, a course of this nature is designed for the total student body and not simply for the "exceptional" cases, (i.e., the "bad apples"). The basic goals of these courses are to introduce the student to what the law defines as criminal behavior, to indicate the cost of crime to the victim including those crimes which are considered relatively minor (i.e., vandalism), and to provide instruction on the basic principles of

crime prevention, especially with respect to the personal property of the student and his family members.

The general orientation of a crime prevention "curriculum" is not to "lecture" directly to the student that certain forms of behavior are inappropriate, but rather to illustrate why society has codified a set of rules or laws that define some actions as legally wrong. This type of strategy, being geared toward the potential offender, is a longer-run and more "curative" approach than many other types of "prevention" and deterrent strategies which are proposed as solutions to reduce crime. Given the extensiveness of involvement in vandalism among rural youth, these strategies may prove effective, especially if they train the young person to be more assertive and less willing to "bow" to peer group pressure.

It is necessary at this point to initiate research designed to test the effectiveness of strategies which are directed to modifying the motivational structure that creates an atmosphere in which vandalism is generally viewed as a "game" or "joke." Although this type of approach has a great deal of common sense appeal, it is too premature to accurately gauge its viability.

OPPORTUNITY

According to the results of the Ohio and Indiana studies, the opportunity to commit vandalism was not significantly decreased by the degree to which rural youth participated in activities beyond regular school hours. Opportunity in terms of availability of time to commit vandalism

will always be present to some degree, no matter how many sports, clubs, and other organizations to which a young person may belong.

However, opportunity has a second dimension which goes beyond the mere availability of time. Opportunity also refers to the availability of situations in which vandalism is a likely outcome due to "peer" influences within the group. Evidence from the Ohio study demonstrates the countervailing nature of positive feelings toward involvement in family activities and whether or not rural youth engage in vandalistic behavior. In addition, frequency of participation in church-related activities also influenced involvement in vandalism in both the Ohio and Indiana studies. Both pieces of evidence indicate that it is not participation in mere quantitative terms which operates as an effective preventive strategy by restructuring the young person's utilization of free time after school and on weekends (i.e., opportunity), but instead it is the quality of such activities. As mentioned previously, Hirschi (1969) has stressed the internalization of normative prescriptions through such socialization mechanisms as the family, the church, the school, to be important influences in creating non-delinquent behavior. Also of importance in contemporary American society, with the large amounts of time available beyond what is necessary for work, or in the case of the adolescent, for school, is the orientation toward and utilization of leisure time.

Prevention strategies which seek to reduce the commission of vandalism by rural youth must be cognizant that it is how leisure time is used, that is, the quality of utilization, which is important. The old adage that "idle hands are the devil's workshop" may not be appropriate to the

design of strategies to reduce vandalism among rural youth. Although youth recreation programs may be necessary for some rural communities, especially where such facilities or programs are not presently available, their mere existence may have little effect on the reduction of vandalism or other forms of deviant behavior among youth. Such programs may even be counter-productive if they serve to strengthen the influence of the peer group beyond regular school hours. For instance, the commission of vandalism by rural youth may increase while commuting to and from a particular recreational activity.

AVAILABILITY

Availability refers to the degree to which a particular object is perceived as a likely target for the vandal. As the findings from the Ohio and Indiana studies indicated, the target may be in either a rural or urban location, and may be either private or public property. In contrast to the longer-run offender-oriented strategies which attempt to modify the motivational and opportunity structure conducive to the commission of vandalism, prevention strategies here would be oriented toward making the potential target less inviting. Law enforcement has long called this type of strategy "target-hardening."

The target-hardening approach may be especially effective in deterring a substantial proportion of rural youth from committing a vandalistic act against a specific target. For instance, the isolated farm and non-farm residences in the open-country may lead the potential vandal to believe there is little chance of being seen committing an act of vandalism, and therefore of being caught. Proper lighting may

prove to be an effective method for the owner to reduce the probability that his property may end up as the target. Public property, such as a park or recreation area, often become the targets for vandalistic behavior. One method to curb the recurrence of damage is by fixing the vandalized property as soon as possible after its occurrence. It has been found that allowing vandalized property to remain unrepaired encourages additional vandalism in the same general area (Bennett, 1969).

Against those youth who perceive vandalism as a game or joke, and are not motivated for reasons of revenge or in association with the commission of more serious crimes, the target-hardening approach does provide a viable deterrence strategy. This former type of vandal is likely to define the risk as too great. However, target-hardening techniques tend to displace the problem from the property which has been "hardened," to property which remains "vulnerable."

ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility may be defined as the degree to which the vandal is able to get to, reach, or make contact with the potential target. The primary mode of transportation for rural youth from the Ohio and Indiana studies who have been involved in vandalism was a motor vehicle. The car, pick-up truck, four-wheel drive jeep, etc. allow young persons to have ready accessibility over a wide geogrpahic area. It is a fairly simple matter to travel to a location at which the potential vandal feels he is not known (i.e., to feel anonymous), and therefore decrease the probability that he will be recognized and subsequently caught.

Oscar Newman (1972) has demonstrated that spatial lay-out is an important situational factor in explaining why some places manifest higher crime rates than others. Rural areas are especially vulnerable because of low population density and relatively longer distances between neighbors than in towns and cities. This factor, coupled with the ability of motor vehicles to make potential targets easily accessible, are together conducive to the creation of situations in which the commission of vandalism is inviting to the potential vandal.

SUMMARY REMARKS

Vandalism is widespread in many rural areas of the United States. The results from the data presented in this chapter indicates that a slight majority of rural youth have been actively engaged in creating the problem. In fact, the evidence shows that vandalism is not perceived as "unacceptable" behavior by rural youth. Its root cause may be found in the motivational factors which determine whether or not rural youth will choose to engage in vandalistic behavior. Preventive strategies which may prove most effective on a long-run basis are those attitude and behavior change approaches oriented to the potential offender.

FOOTNOTES

¹More detailed information about the methodological procedures employed in the Ohio vandalism study may be found in Bartlett (1976).

²More detailed information about the methodological procedures of the Indiana vandalism study may be found in Donnermeyer (1980d).

³Both studies defined vandalism for the respondents as follows: "...the willful or malicious destruction, injury, disfigurement or defacement of any public or private property, real or personal, without consent of the owner or person having custody or control, by cutting, tearing, breaking, marking, painting, drawing, covering with filth, or any other such means as may be specified by local law."

⁴Levels of severity were developed through a rating system. A panel of four judges independently were instructed to read each description of vandalistic behavior and assign a score from 1 (minor) to 4 (very serious). A specific incident was classified only upon receiving a minimum of three identical rankings. Only a few incidents did not receive identical rankings by at least three judges. These incidents formed a second list which was then given to a fifth judge in order to "break the tie."

⁵Chi-square analysis of sex and involvement in vandalism was performed. For the Ohio study, $X^2=54.4$, $p \leq .001$ ($df=1$). For the Indiana study, $X^2=13.02$, $p \leq .01$ ($df=1$).

⁶For the Ohio study, X^2 for the relationship between age and involvement in vandalism was .522, $p \geq .05$ ($df=1$). For the Indiana study, $X^2=5.68$, $p \leq .05$ ($df=1$).

⁷For the Ohio study, X^2 for the relationship between marital status and involvement in vandalism was 8.2, $p \leq .01$ ($df=1$). For the Indiana study, $X^2=1.2$, $p \geq .05$ ($df=1$).

⁸For the relationship between self-perception about participation in family activities and involvement in vandalism (Ohio study only), $X^2=12.76$, $p \leq .01$ ($df=1$).

⁹For the Ohio study, the chi-square relationship between church membership and involvement in vandalism was .091, $p \geq .05$ ($df=1$). For the Indiana study, $X^2=1.01$, $p \geq .05$ ($df=1$).

¹⁰For the Ohio study, the relationship between frequency of participation in religious activities and involvement in vandalism was 4.5, $p \leq .05$ ($df=1$). For the Indiana study, $X^2=5.15$, $p \leq .05$ ($df=1$). Chi-square was here based upon weekly vs. non-weekly participation in religious activities.

¹¹For the relationship between participation in school-related extra-curricular activities and involvement in vandalism (Indiana study only), $X^2=.64$, $p \geq .05$ (df=1). For the relationship between participation in out of school extra-curricular activities and involvement in vandalism (Indiana study only), $X^2=2.1$, $p \geq .05$ (df=1).

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